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HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK



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SATISFYING home life is essential to national well-being.

Nearly one half of the people of the United States live in rural homes, and the maintenance of a fine type of citizenry in these homes is an essential factor in good government.

Through the provisions of the Smith-Lever Act, educational service in home making is provided to give practical aid to even the most isolated farm families.

This work is a vital force in developing capable rural leadership for the improvement of physical, economic, and social conditions of the rural home and community. It is a public service from which every American citizen receives direct or indirect benefit.

C. B. SMITH,
Chief, Office of Cooperative-Extension Work.

HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK

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INTRODUCTION

There are over 6,000,000 farm homes in the United States. The women and girls who so largely influence the family life in these homes are endeavoring to develop efficiency in their home-making duties and to find satisfaction for themselves and their families in rural life.

To aid them in this effort, home demonstration work, a Nation-wide system of home-making education, is carried on by the United States Department of Agriculture and the State colleges of agriculture. The local representative of this system is the home demonstration agent. She is a college graduate trained in home economics, who works with the women and girls of a given county. The home demonstration agent keeps informed regarding all matters that affect the home and brings the latest scientific information to rural home makers in such form that they can readily apply it in practical daily life (fig. 1).

The home demonstration agent serves the rural home alike in times of prosperity and in times of distress. She keeps pace with current developments, adapting her service to changing economic and social conditions that affect rural people, and carries out a program based on needs recognized by the home makers themselves.

The first home demonstration work was with rural girls. In 1910 a tomato club of 47 girls was formed in Aiken County, S.C.

The work with women began in 1913 and was rapidly established in 15 Southern States. In 1914 the Smith-Lever Act authorizing cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics was passed, making Federal funds available for home demonstration work throughout the United States. Federal, State, and county governments cooperate in maintaining the home demonstration agents.

The work has consistently expanded in volume and in scope, and at present home demonstration work is conducted in every State, in Hawaii, and in Alaska.

More than a million rural women and girls are active members of groups organized to participate in this work. Additional home makers by tens of thousands who cannot attend regular meetings of groups are given helpful assistance through press articles, exhibits, public meetings, and the like.

SCOPE OF HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK

In every home are problems relating to food, clothing, and shelter for the family. There is a desire, too, to make the home comfortable and attractive and to obtain some time for recreation and social life. To meet these needs ways must be found to do the tasks of the home



FIGURE 1.—Efficient selection, arrangement, and use of kitchen and other household equipment eliminates drudgery from the farm home.

with a minimum of labor and time and to devise sources of income that will enable the home maker to purchase those things that will make for efficiency, comfort, and attractiveness. In accomplishing these ends the home demonstration agent takes a leading part.

Correct feeding of the family is a basic necessity. Through home demonstration work, rural women and girls are given practical instruction as to what foods to select and how to prepare them to keep the family in good health. They learn the most effective methods of producing, preserving, and storing vegetables, fruits, and other foods in needed amounts for the year's supply. Their pantries contain a proper variety and volume of foods for use during winter months and for emergencies.

Clothing the family in good taste and at a minimum of cost is a perennial problem of the rural home maker. The home demonstration agent teaches women and girls how to select hygienic clothing that

conforms to standards of utility, attractiveness, and ease in cleaning (fig. 2). She teaches them how to construct and use a foundation pattern, short-cut methods of clothing construction and renovation, and proper care and use of the sewing machine and its parts. They learn the essentials of good line, color, and design. They learn to make an economical selection when purchasing ready-made garments and household fabrics.

As a means of increasing the family income, rural women and girls are helped to produce and to market products of their homes and gardens (fig. 3). Standardization and grading of products are taught, and rural home makers are aided in setting up effective marketing



FIGURE 2.—The home demonstration agent helps rural women to make efficient purchase of articles of clothing that cannot be constructed economically at home.

associations of their own or in marketing their products through roadside stands, curb markets, parcel post, or car-lot shipments. Much of the money earned by these means has been used for such purposes as additional education for boys and girls, labor-saving equipment, and improved furnishings for the home.

Intelligent management of a home requires much planning ability, and rural home makers throughout the Nation receive assistance in this field from home demonstration agents. They are aided in planning efficient methods of conducting household tasks on the basis of individual needs. Through home demonstration work well-selected labor-saving equipment and efficient arrangement of kitchens have been obtained by thousands of rural home makers. Household accounts have been kept by many of the women, and the home demonstration agent has helped them to interpret the accounts, that they might utilize the income to greater advantage in the coming year.

Home demonstration agents are helping rural women and girls to improve their homes with renovated or carefully selected furniture well arranged, properly finished walls and floors, and suitable and attractive accessories such as draperies and pictures. Through these means, comfort has been provided for the family, and hospitality to friends and neighbors has been encouraged.

Home crafts, such as rug making, basketry, and art textiles, included in home demonstration work, have brought beauty as well as practical utility into rural homes and have added to the family income in times of need.



FIGURE 3.—When income is low farm women sell home crafts and food products of high quality to help provide necessities and comforts for the home.

Landscape gardening, including the planting of flowers, shrubs, grass, and trees, as well as orderliness of home grounds, has been stimulated by home demonstration work. Attractive and well-cared-for home grounds, developed at little expense, indicate the interest of rural women and girls in this endeavor.

Since health is vital in rural homes, women and girls are taught standards of positive health, home care of the sick, emergency aid, home sanitation, the relation of food, clothing, and posture to good health, and matters of community health, such as prevention of spread of contagious diseases.

One of the most important phases of home demonstration work is child care and training. Rural parents are helped to understand the child's nature and needs at various ages, to develop desired mental, physical, and emotional habits, and to establish desirable family relationships (fig. 4).

Community life is also considered in home demonstration work, with the result that, through the united efforts of rural women, highways and public grounds are beautified, community centers and rest rooms are provided, community recreation and social activities are

sponsored, community meals are selected on a basis of nutritional needs, school-playground equipment is obtained, and hot school lunches and proper sanitary conditions in rural schools are provided.

There is no age limit or other barrier for women desiring to participate in home demonstration work. The prospective rural home maker, the mother of a growing family, and the older, less active woman, perhaps a grandmother, all find satisfaction in home demonstration work as an aid in meeting daily responsibilities and in solving their problems.

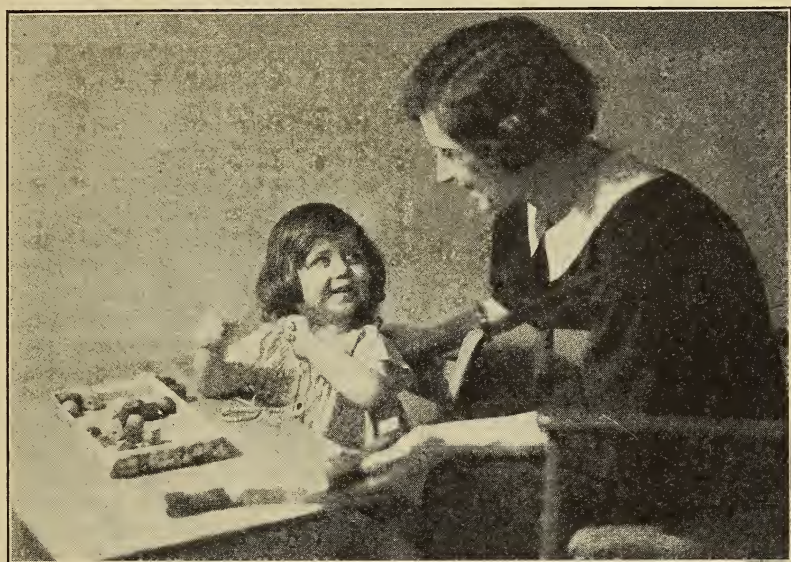


FIGURE 4.—Rural women are being aided in understanding the needs and abilities of children at various ages and in training them in right habits and desirable family relationships.

Home demonstration work aids rural women in utilizing all the resources of the home, the farm, and the community in providing satisfying life for the farm family. It helps women and girls to grow in keenness of thinking regarding their responsibilities. It develops their skill and judgment in matters of home making. It stimulates them to initiate and carry on activities which contribute to neighborliness, community satisfaction, and civic efficiency.

HOW COMMUNITIES ORGANIZE FOR HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK

In the average county in the United States there are 2,500 rural families. There are approximately 25 rural communities per county. Participation in home demonstration work stimulates women and girls in these communities to their best effort in obtaining desirable home and community life, and the home demonstration agent helps those who desire her assistance in this effort. Time would not permit the home demonstration agent to visit 2,000 or more home makers individually, so for the most part she meets them in organized community groups or clubs. Membership in the community group usually

ranges from 12 to 25 persons. During 1932 over 800,000 women were members of such groups.

Each local group elects its own officers and plans its own program. The groups meet at regular intervals, usually once a month, throughout the year. They generally meet in farm homes. A local group usually has a president and a secretary. An increasing number of groups have news chairmen who report news of their activities to the local papers. Committees are appointed as needed.

The plan of organization varies slightly from State to State. In the majority of States an organization is especially set up for the purpose of conducting home demonstration work. Sometimes groups already organized undertake home demonstration work, but they follow the same procedure as do the groups especially formed.

The community is the accepted unit of organization, the community being any area in which people normally have such contacts as those connected with schools, churches, and recreation. In a few States the school district forms the unit of organization. The meetings of local groups are conducted on a businesslike basis. The meeting is called to order by the president or chairman. Each member reports what improvements she has made as a result of the instruction given at the last meeting, and there is discussion as to satisfaction derived and difficulties experienced. The topic for the day is then considered, constituting the major part of the meeting.

In many communities during each meeting a short period is used for recreation, in which the women learn songs and games which they enjoy and can use for various types of meetings. In some communities where meetings of women are infrequent, a short time is devoted to refreshments and social intercourse after the business meeting.

In many counties, in addition to the community officers and leaders, a county-wide committee of women is elected by the local groups to advise with the home demonstration agent regarding home demonstration work throughout the year, that it may be of maximum service to the home makers of the county. At intervals this committee meets with the home demonstration agent and the State leader of home demonstration work to discuss progress made and further needs, and ways of accomplishing desired results through committee activities and otherwise. From time to time these committee members visit community groups. Once a year the committee meets to recommend one or more phases of work for inclusion in the yearly programs of community groups throughout the county.

All volunteer leaders who participate in home demonstration work, whether officers, news chairmen, or those who pass on instruction to their neighbors, receive training in their designated responsibilities from members of the home demonstration staff. Thus, in addition to improving home-making practices, home demonstration work develops abilities of leadership among rural women. It places upon them responsibilities of organization, of program planning, of passing on the information to their neighbors, and of analyzing results. They learn how to preside efficiently at meetings and to speak easily and forcefully in public.

County-wide federations of local groups, and State federations of county groups, have developed in many States.

HOW THE COMMUNITY PROGRAM IS PLANNED

Each year in thousands of rural communities, groups of women, with the assistance of the home demonstration agent, determine upon the year's home demonstration program of work. Home demonstration programs are planned on the basis of self-recognized interests by all members of the group concerned. The members determine what is to be done and how much.

In some States the women plan for one type of home-making activity to be considered during the year; in other States a variety of subjects, sometimes six or more, are planned on a seasonal basis. Often an activity of community-wide value, such as a hot school lunch, community recreation, or the landscaping of public grounds, is included in the community program.

The home demonstration agent helps the women to adjust the programs from year to year as new interests develop. Through this plan their broadening outlook is reflected in the program selected.

In some States programs of work are not planned until there is a well-defined county-wide organization with community units and a home demonstration agent who is employed to lead the work. In other States, if a specified number of groups in a county request instruction, a member of the State home demonstration staff may go to the county a few times during the year for a limited type of program, to indicate the nature of home demonstration work. In such counties instruction is given to local leaders selected by such groups, who in turn train the other members of the group until a home demonstration agent is employed.

The Extension Service concerns itself with educational work for adults and for boys and girls. The home demonstration agent aids in developing 4-H club work for girls as well as the work with women. The program for a girls' 4-H club, like that for the women, is usually selected by the club members, with the assistance of the home demonstration agent and some interested adult who acts as local leader for them.

In many States the community program of activities is printed in a yearbook of the local home demonstration club, with the date and topic for the meeting for each month of the year. In the majority of States, at the end of each year county-wide achievement days or their equivalent are held, when an all-day program is presented by the women to indicate to relatives, friends, and to the public the results achieved in the county through home demonstration work. Playlets and songs are often used to interpret these results. In addition to the playlets, instrumental music, an exhibit, inspirational talks by outstanding speakers, community singing, and a community meal are usually included in the day's program. Following Achievement Day, the next year's program is planned, and goals are set in terms of further needs and of probable completion. The community programs have increasingly contributed to the health, income, efficiency, and satisfaction of rural women and girls, and to the communities in which they live (fig. 5).

In many States county-wide programs are formulated. A county program may be one which all communities in the county jointly select through their chosen delegates, or it may be a summary of those activities which the several communities have selected without

joint action with other communities. In a few States, State-wide programs have been set up. Such programs have usually been the result of joint consideration of conditions by rural women and members of the home demonstration staff. They are then sponsored by the home demonstration agents of the State concerned.

THE HOME DEMONSTRATION AGENT

The home demonstration agent is a valued leader and understanding friend as well as an adviser of rural women and girls. She knows their interests and desires and realizes the many complex problems which confront them. Her position makes it essential that she enter into their daily life. Her visits to women and girls bring cheer and satisfaction as well as helpful information (fig. 6). She thus becomes a living force in all constructive efforts of the people in the county,

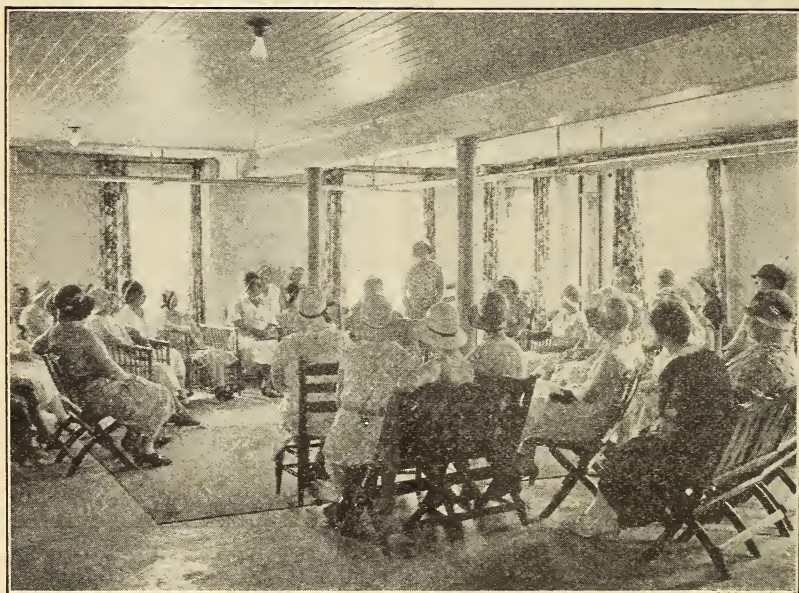


FIGURE 5.—Home demonstration groups plan needed community improvements. Their clubhouses often are used as centers for community good times.

giving needed help or advice from her training and experience, or helping them to obtain assistance from other sources, if necessary. One of her concerns is to sustain the courage of rural people to meet their problems and thus to aid them in making rural homes and communities of the county comfortable, attractive, and efficient places for developing family life at its best.

The home demonstration agent is essentially interested in rural life. She is usually mature enough to have discriminating judgment and young enough to possess faith and enthusiasm.

The home demonstration agent's services are many and varied. She helps rural women and girls to realize the possibilities for a satisfying rural life, to set up challenging goals of achievement for themselves, and to make plans that will bring about the desired con-

ditions. She aids women and girls in developing skill in housekeeping and in managing their income, time, and energy effectively. She interests local merchants, bankers, editors, and others in promoting the home demonstration program. She plans ways of getting increasing numbers of women and girls to participate in home demonstration work. She prepares items for the county press on effective



FIGURE 6.—Visits from friendly home demonstration agents help farm women to solve perplexing home-making problems and to meet life efficiently and philosophically.

methods being practiced in rural homes and on other activities of rural women that have news value. She helps with exhibits, short courses, and camps for rural women and girls. She trains those who are responsible for organization or subject matter. She maintains an office where rural women may advise with her and obtain information on home demonstration work and home making. She helps rural

families to meet situations of economic depression. In times of disaster she takes a leading part along with relief agencies in relieving distress. Home demonstration agents have given valuable assistance in emergency situations due to influenza, hurricane, flood, drought, and economic distress.

Four or five days of each week are used by the home demonstration agent in instructing groups of women and of girls, visiting rural homes, and counseling with group officers and local leaders. She usually spends 1 day each week in her office answering correspondence, planning future work, preparing illustrative material, giving advice to visitors, and the like.

The home demonstration agent is technically trained in the problems of the rural home—home planning, home making, child care and training, health, home beautification, and all the other things that go toward the making of an efficient, satisfying home, within the income of the owner or tenant.

The home demonstration agent must have a pleasing personality and qualities of capable leadership. She must be able to speak effectively in public. She cooperates with and is the coordinate of the county agricultural agent, who works with the farmers and rural boys of the county. The usually accepted standard for a home demonstration agent is that she be a graduate of an accredited college, having majored in home economics, and have professional experience of a kind that will aid her in performing her complex duties (fig. 7).

Home demonstration agents are aided by home-economics specialists in planning subject-matter and teaching methods. The agents are selected, trained, and supervised by a State leader of home demonstration work and district leaders. The subject-matter staff and the supervisors have headquarters at the college of agriculture and visit the agents when needed. The State leader is in charge of all State and county home demonstration workers and is responsible for basic programs, methods, and procedure used in carrying on and in extending the work. Federal supervisors and subject-matter specialists aid the State and county staffs in similar manner.

NEGRO HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK

In 13 States home demonstration work for Negro women and girls is carried on by Negro home demonstration agents.

The program of work for Negroes usually includes food production and preservation and home sanitation, the latter involving white-washing of buildings, sanitary toilets, clean grounds, and use of screens at doors and windows. Emphasis is given to the need for dairy cows, year-round gardens, poultry, better home furnishings, and milk in the diet of children.

METHODS USED BY THE HOME DEMONSTRATION AGENT

Home demonstration work has been a pioneer field in the education of adults in the United States. It has had little precedent to follow, and its experience among adults in arousing and sustaining interest in an educational program, which often requires a complete change in habits of work and in attitude of mind, as well as much time and

energy, has made a distinct contribution to methods of adult education in the United States.

Home demonstration work is based upon a "learn to do by doing" plan of learning. The procedure is usually as follows:

The group of rural women decide on the desired program of work for the year, the number and frequency of meetings, and the subjects to be considered.

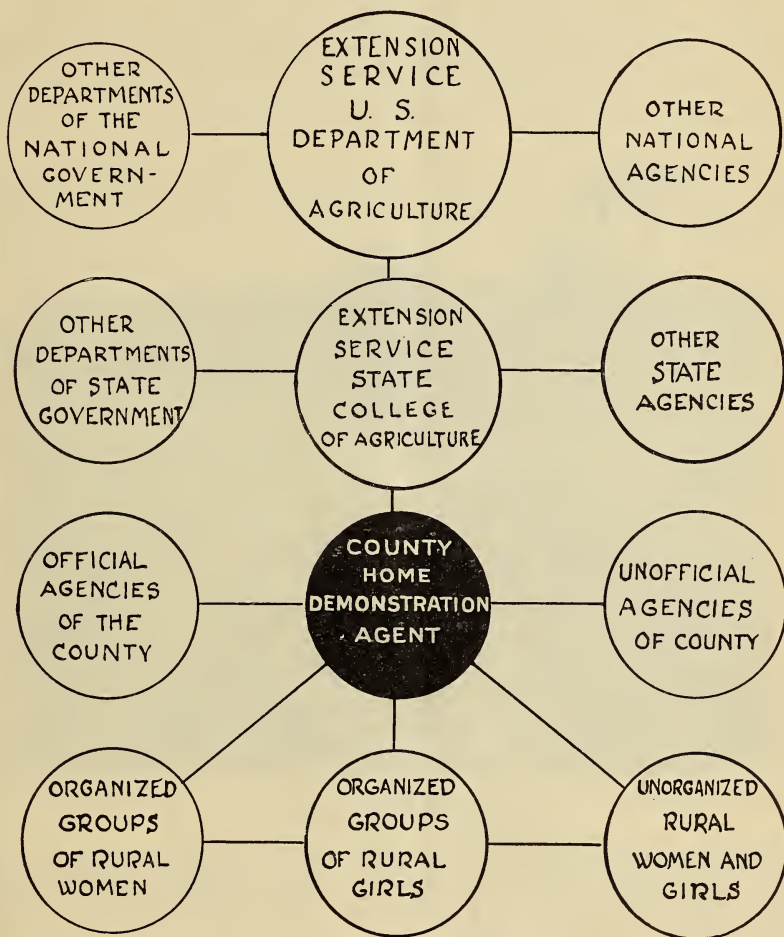


FIGURE 7.—The relationships of the home demonstration agent.

The meetings usually are held in farm homes. At each meeting the home demonstration agent stimulates informal discussion of the topic by the seasoned home makers present, whose contributions to the discussion are based upon their experience and judgment. One or more of the women may be outstandingly successful in the field concerned, and their contribution develops qualities of leadership, assures continuing interest among those participating, and stimulates other members of the group to follow their example. After the dis-

cussion by group members, the home demonstration agent gives any additional information that she deems desirable. Practical application of the recommended procedure is then demonstrated by the agent or by an experienced home maker, or by inexperienced home makers under the guidance of the home demonstration agent. The demonstration usually is illustrated with samples of material or equipment, posters, photographs, charts, models, and the like. Mimeographed or printed copies of instructions are usually distributed.

After the demonstration the women carry out the same practices in their homes under normal living conditions. For example, after a demonstration of meal planning and preparation, other meals applying principles of good nutrition are planned and prepared at home, and the results are brought back to the group for discussion (fig. 8). This



FIGURE 8.—The garden based on nutritional needs provides health for the family and lends interest to meal planning and preparation.

combination of home-laboratory work and group discussion gives the home maker more interest in her work, allows her to profit by the experience of others, and gives her the latest authoritative scientific information.

Some of the women, known as home demonstrators, undertake to keep accurate records of what is done and of results obtained, and then, for the benefit of the entire community, they make public the benefits derived, usually at a general meeting arranged for that purpose. The home demonstration agent gives special supervision to these demonstrators.

In some States each local group of women elects two members to act as local leaders throughout the year. These leaders meet monthly and are trained by the home demonstration agent or specialist in the phase of home making which forms the program of work. The

leaders return to their respective groups and repeat the instruction and information as given to them. They also keep records of the improved practices reported by group members. In those States where the program content varies during the year, instruction is given to a selected group of women in each subject included in the program. These women are called leaders or demonstrators and serve as leaders for the subject in their respective communities.

Where the local-leader plan is used, the leader who returns to her group follows the same general procedure as the home demonstration agent, except that she undertakes less complicated responsibilities and confines her instruction to those matters in which she has been trained by the home demonstration agent or specialist.

The women or the girls to be taught in one group by the home demonstration agent may have a widely varied status of age, nationality, ideals, and experience, and of social, economic, and educational development. The home demonstration agent must plan varied means to interest them all, and must be certain that the instruction is clearly understood by each one.

In addition to the local group meetings, subject matter is disseminated by the home demonstration agent to persons who may not attend organized group meetings. For this purpose the agents use news articles, radio talks, tours, fair exhibits, window displays, circular letters, and pamphlets. Instruction is also given at farm women's camps, achievement-day meetings, county and State short courses, and general meetings.

RURAL WOMEN AS LEADERS

One of the outstanding results of home demonstration work is the number of efficient volunteer leaders that have been developed. During 1932, 147,934 women served as volunteer leaders of home demonstration work and 49,494 served as volunteer leaders of 4-H club work.

Various types of volunteer services are given by rural women. Tens of thousands of rural women each year act as demonstrators of desirable home-making practices. They make available the information concerning the undertaking and allow their demonstrations to be viewed by those interested. In addition there are community, county, and State committees of rural women who are giving volunteer service to increase the membership and strengthen the services of the organization. Other women chosen by local groups receive subject-matter training from the home demonstration agent and in turn train their neighbors (fig. 9). Many women each year become volunteer leaders in 4-H club work. Some serve as volunteer news chairmen. They receive training in news writing and regularly prepare items on home demonstration activities for the local press. Still other women act as recreational chairmen and see to it that wholesome fun and music are introduced for a short time into each meeting and are used in the communities represented by the women members.

The value of the experience and judgment of these home makers has been recognized to an increasing extent by the home demonstration staff. Step by step the women and girls have assumed additional responsibilities, until at present in the majority of States the home demonstration staff makes no major decisions regarding the work without consulting a committee of rural women.

The thousands of rural women who have accepted the responsibilities of local leadership and have carried their duties through to successful completion have developed a responsible leadership in the open country. These women are thinking in broad terms of family and community well-being. They are considering matters economic and social. They are courageously and intelligently meeting situations as they arise. They are interviewing bankers, editors, commissioners, merchants, and school and health authorities to promote



FIGURE 9.—A home demonstration agent teaching local leaders the uses and care of sewing machines. Each woman later repeats the demonstration to a group of neighbors.

rural well-being. They are setting up standards for desirable rural conditions and planning means for bringing them about. They are demonstrating desirable practices for rural homes and challenging other rural home makers to make similar improvements.

As a result of local leadership, rural women have extended their friendships, have expanded their knowledge, and have known the joy of community service and its reward in the appreciation of those who have been served.